

WASHINGTON TIMES
3 September 1985

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 6A

Greenpeace bombing reminds France of 1965 scandal

By Curtis Cate
SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

PARIS — If comparisons are odorous, as Madame Malaprop declared in Sheridan's "The Rivals," they are particularly so in cloak-and-dagger operations that turn sour.

Because of the enormous publicity it has generated in three short weeks, the July 10 bombing in Auckland of the Greenpeace ship, Rainbow Warrior, is now being compared to another major scandal in the checkered history of France's intelligence services: the mysterious disappearance in Paris almost 20 years ago of the Moroccan opposition leader, Mehdi Ben Barka.

At first sight, the "Watergaffe

NEWS ANALYSIS

scandal" — as the satirical weekly, "Le Canard enchaîné," has just dubbed the Auckland harbor bombing — might seem to be the less serious of the two affairs. Its single casualty — Greenpeace photographer, Fernando Pereira, who was killed by the second of two underwater blasts — did not enjoy the immense international prestige of Mr. Ben Barka, a tireless promoter of Third World causes and one of the architects of the Tricontinental Congress held in 1966 in Havana.

In other respects, however, the crippling of the Rainbow Warrior may well prove more of an embarrassment to Francois Mitterrand's Socialist government than the kidnap-killing of Mr. Ben Barka in October 1965 was to President Charles de Gaulle and his prime minister, Georges Pompidou. The Moroccan politician's abduction, though it was engineered by a French secret-service agent with the help of two inspectors from the Paris Prefecture of Police, was not an operation that had been ordered at the highest level of the French intelligence apparatus — a circumstance which permitted Gen. de Gaulle to dismiss it loftily as something of a "vulgar and subaltern" nature.

The Rainbow Warrior bombing, on the other hand, was carried out on foreign territory with the active connivance of at least three French intelligence officers whose identities have now been pretty well established. They were assisted by at least four others, who either belonged to or were recruited for the job by the DGSE — the Direction Generale de la Securite Exterieur — the French equivalent of the CIA.

The men and women involved may not all have been professional "spooks," but none of them seem to be thugs such as those who kidnapped Mr. Ben Barka in the hope of being handsomely rewarded by certain Moroccan officials and who had to dispose of him when they found they had an embarrassing corpse on their hands. It is thus going to be far more difficult for the present Socialist government in Paris to dismiss the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior as "vulgar and subaltern."

Compared to the incredibly turgid Ben Barka affair, the Rainbow Warrior scandal seems almost insignificant. But this is precisely why it is so loaded with diplomatic dynamite.

Should it be proved — at the Auckland trial due to begin in November if not before — that senior officials in the present French government have been promoting "state terrorism," it would embroil France in a major clash with New Zealand and split the French Socialist Party even more than it now is on the eve of a decisive election campaign.

What has stunned many Paris observers, causing some of them to suspect that Britain's MI-6 secret intelligence service helped to engineer the "bungle," has been the incredible number of telltale clues left behind by professional French agents.

Of the two agents who were traveling in New Zealand with bogus Swiss passports and who are now imprisoned in an Auckland jail, one, masquerading as Sophie Turenge, has now been formally identified as Dominique Prieur, a French army captain married to a man who, until recently, commanded a Left-Bank fire brigade.

Posing as her husband was "Alain Turenge," identified as Maj. Alain Mafart, a skilled frogman who was second-in-command of the underwater training base at Aspretto, near Ajaccio, in Corsica.

"Frederique Bonlieu," who was sent to New Zealand in early May to befriend the Greenpeace anti-nuclear crusaders and incidentally to map Auckland harbor, has likewise been exposed as Christine Cabon, an adventure-loving woman from the Pyrenean town of Pau who was recruited some years ago into the DGSE's "renseignement" (intelligence-gathering) service because of her interest in geography.

More adept or luckier than the unfortunate "Turenges," who made little effort to clear out in a hurry after two limpet mines blew a gaping hole in the hull of the "Rainbow Warrior," Miss Cabon left New Zealand in late May and flew to Tahiti, where she is credited with having helped intercept letters sent to Greenpeace friends by the Swedish consul, Bengt Danielson, a local "guru" well known for his anti-nuclear-testing sentiments.

Christine Cabon, alias Frederique Bonlieu, then headed for Israel to take part in an archaeological excavation, one of her passions. When her bogus name first surfaced in the Auckland Star, on or around July 27, she apparently was tipped off by her superiors. According to one report, she lost no time climbing on a TWA plane bound for Paris and New York. According to another report, she moved on to Lebanon, where she has adopted another name, dyed her hair, and donned dark glasses.

Three "yachtsmen" the French government has since identified as Master Sgt. Roland Verge and two sergeants named Andries and Bartelo — all frogmen — set sail from New Caledonia in late June in the sloop Ouvea and encountered heavy seas before sailing down New Zealand's east coast in early July.

Continued

2.

Ouvea moored in a harbor near Auckland for three days before the Rainbow Warrior was bombed, then sailed away. After scuttling their sloop somewhere between the Australian island of Norfolk and French New Caledonia, the three frogmen went into hiding in France, and later turned themselves in only to be immediately released on the grounds that French citizens cannot be extradited to New Zealand.

So much classified information has already been revealed that soon we shall probably also know the true identity of a seventh DGSE "spook," a certain "Major Philippe Dubast," who flew on June 7 in the same UTA (Union des Transports Aeriens) plane that carried Sgts. Verge, Andries and Bartelo to Noumea. Considerably older than the others, he is thought to have masterminded the anti-Rainbow Warrior operation.

Unlike the Ben Barka "interception," which cost its authors almost nothing to organize, the Rainbow Warrior bombing was an expensive enterprise. The paymaster of the DGSE, a former prefect named Philippe Parent, is known to be a strict accountant and it is inconceivable that he should have agreed to fork out the necessary funds unless the operation had the approval of the DGSE's boss, Adm. Pierre Lacoste.

In January 1966, the then-head of France's intelligence service, Gen. Paul Jacquier, was made a scapegoat for the Ben Barka fiasco and dismissed even though he had not been informed by his subordinates of what was going on. As an air force general, he was not an intelligence professional.

The same fate may overtake Adm. Lacoste — if only to save Charles Hernu, the French Defense Minister. For years before the Socialists finally came to power in May 1981, Mr. Hernu spared no efforts to convert skeptical party members to a grudging acceptance of nuclear testing and the maintenance of France's "force de frappe," originally a Gaullist creation that many Socialists, like the Communists, had condemned.

It was clearly to reassure the French armed forces, dumbfounded like so many others by the incredible clumsiness of their supposedly "secret service," that President Mitterrand recently issued a directive ordering the military to use force if

necessary to halt all violations of "French territorial waters and French air space" in the vicinity of the Mururoa and Fantagaua atolls.

The inevitable effect of this order, however, is to make the Rainbow Warrior operation look more foolish and unnecessary than ever.

Precisely because the operation had to be undertaken in a foreign port, it should logically have had the approval of Foreign Minister Roland Dumas and Defense Minister Hernu, who has official jurisdiction over the DGSE. But if the operation was endorsed by a small foreign affairs and defense working group, the prime minister's office should have been informed as well.

This is why a number of French opposition leaders — led by the fiery Charles Pasqua, leader of the Gaullist RPR in the Senate — and the super-patriotic former premier, Michel Debre (now a deputy from the French Indian Ocean island of Reunion) have been demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Laurent Fabius.

While senior French civil servant Bernard Tricot's official report on the incident Aug. 26 cleared both the government and DGSE of complicity in the bombing, it has been widely dismissed as a whitewash, adding to the Mitterrand-Fabius government's problems in denying charges of either incompetence or criminal responsibility for a homicide.

As Andre Giraud, who served as Minister of Industry under former Premier Raymond Barre, recently summed it up: "Was the question [of the Rainbow Warrior operation] submitted to an interministerial examination? If not, then the government is functioning poorly — and this involves the prime minister. If yes, then the authority that approved the operation must assume responsibility for it."